

Iraqis find three more mass graves in formerly Islamic State-held town of Sinjar

IRBIL, Iraq (AP) — Kurdish officials said Sunday three more mass graves have been found in the northern town of Sinjar, where Kurdish forces backed by heavy U.S.-led airstrikes drove out Islamic State militants earlier this month.

The discovery brings the total number of burial sites in the area to five and the total number of bodies uncovered to between 200 and 300, according to local officials.

While experts say proper excavation and identification of the bodies could take months, Sinjar residents are expressing

frustration with the process so far, complaining that their requests from the Kurdish Regional Government for expert help have gone unanswered.

Residents are seeking a faster identification process and assistance in rebuilding the town, much of which is uninhabitable after more than a year of clashes and airstrikes.

The graves found over the weekend are believed to contain 80 to 100 bodies, Qasim Simo, the head of security in Sinjar, said on Sunday. Two were uncovered to the east of the town and one was found within the western edges

of Sinjar town itself. Experts caution however, that properly counting and identifying the dead is a process that could take months and requires a controlled environment.

Media reports showed some of the burial sites being excavated with heavy construction equipment. At others, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters were seen moving what appeared to be human remains into plastic garbage bags.

"The important thing is that the site is secure," said Kevin Sullivan of the International Commission on Missing Persons, an organization that

specializes in war crimes documentation, including the excavation of mass grave sites.

"The site needs to be controlled, for example, by police or under authority of a prosecutor and the bodies need to be exhumed in a systematic way with any identifying artifacts," as wallets and scraps of clothing, he said. Careful record taking is key to being able to initiate war crimes proceedings in the future, he added.

The proximity of many of the sites in Sinjar to active front lines makes circumstances particularly difficult, Sullivan said.

The first suspected mass graves were uncovered over two weeks ago within days of IS forces being pushed out of Sinjar. One, near the town's center was estimated to contain 78 elderly women's bodies, and another, about 10 miles outside of Sinjar, contained between 50 and 60 bodies of men, women and children, according to Qasim Samir, the Sinjar director of intelligence.

EU, Turkey seek better relations at refugee summit

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union leaders and the Turkish prime minister sealed a joint summit with a commitment to re-energize Turkey's long-stalled membership talks and bolster their common resolve to deal with the Syrian refugee crisis.

The 28 EU leaders were leaning hard on Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to stem the flow of migrants seeking a better future in Europe's heartland and European Council President Donald Tusk said the latest estimate showed that "approximately 1.5 million people" had illegally entered the bloc this year, a lot coming through Turkey. It left the EU in need

of help from Ankara, even if their recent relations have been sown with discord. On Sunday, it was hugs all around as Tusk and Davutoglu completed what they

called a breakthrough summit to put relations on an even keel again.

"Turkish membership will be an asset," said Davutoglu after "no disagreements emerged" during the hastily-called emergency meeting.

Both sides got concessions: The EU desperately needs Turkish help to contain the flow of migrants into the bloc, and Turkey resuscitated long-mothballed hopes to join a bloc in which it would, by population, become one of the biggest member states.

The refugee crisis has reminded European leaders just how much Turkey — whether a bloc member or not — is a pivotal partner for the EU and a buffer state from the bedlam rocking much of the Middle East in recent years.

French President Francois Hollande said Sunday that the EU will need to monitor Turkey's commitments "step-by-step," deal with the migrant crisis, fight extremism and help end Syria's political crisis. He said any funds for a 3 billion-euro (\$3.2 billion) package to help Turkey deal with the migrants on its territory will be released progressively as the commitments are checked.

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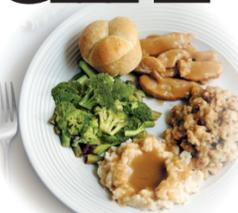
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